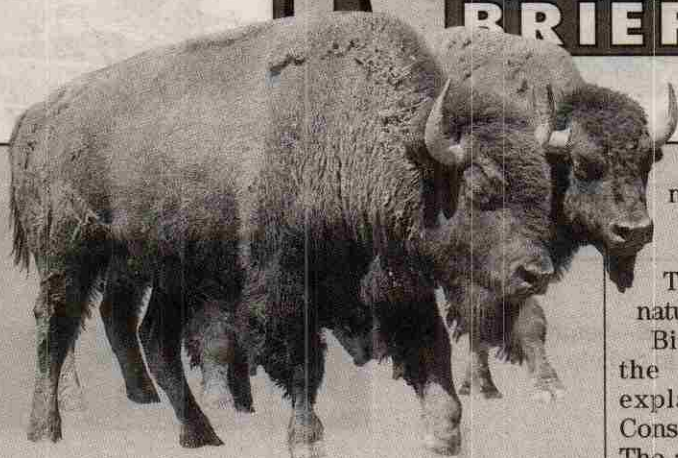


NEWS BRIEFS



ECOSYSTEMS

Bison homecoming

Thanks to a wildlife conservation group, 300 bison are back home on the range.

Some 100 years ago, the species was hunted to near extinction. Ranchers still raised bison for food, but few of the animals survived in their native tallgrass prairie habitat.

Now, the Nature Conservancy, a conservation group, is releasing ranch-raised bison into the wild.

They hope the animals will help restore the prairie, which used to stretch from Texas to Canada, to its natural form.

Bison are essential to the prairie's survival, explains the Nature Conservancy's Ron Geatz. The animals graze on the prairie's unique mix of wildflowers and head-high grasses. Dead plants left behind dry up and catch fire when, say, lightning strikes. The fires clear the land and cause the seeds of some

fire-adapted grasses to begin growing.

By setting the stage for fires, the bison "will help bring back the natural forces that allowed the prairie to evolve and thrive," says Harvey Payne of the Conservancy. The result, he says, will be a miniature prairie that is a living record of the past.

That means a lot to Oklahoma lawyer Geoff Standing Bear, an Osage Indian. He had heard stories from his elders about prairie bison, but had never seen the animals in the wild himself. —S.E.

Will new logging restrictions protect wetlands species, such as the American alligator?

ENVIRONMENT

Wetlands saved?

Environmental groups say a recent decision by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could save thousands of acres of wetlands lost to logging each year. The ruling will force forestry companies to obtain permits before clearing and filling these water-soaked ecosystems to convert them to tree farms.

"Since 1975, forestry companies have caused about half of all wetlands destruction in the United States," says Tim Searchinger of the Environmental Defense Fund.

Wetlands filter water pollutants, reduce flooding by absorbing water, and are home to threatened species, such as the American alligator and Florida panther. Forestry companies choose to plant and log these areas because water and nutrients are abundant and the

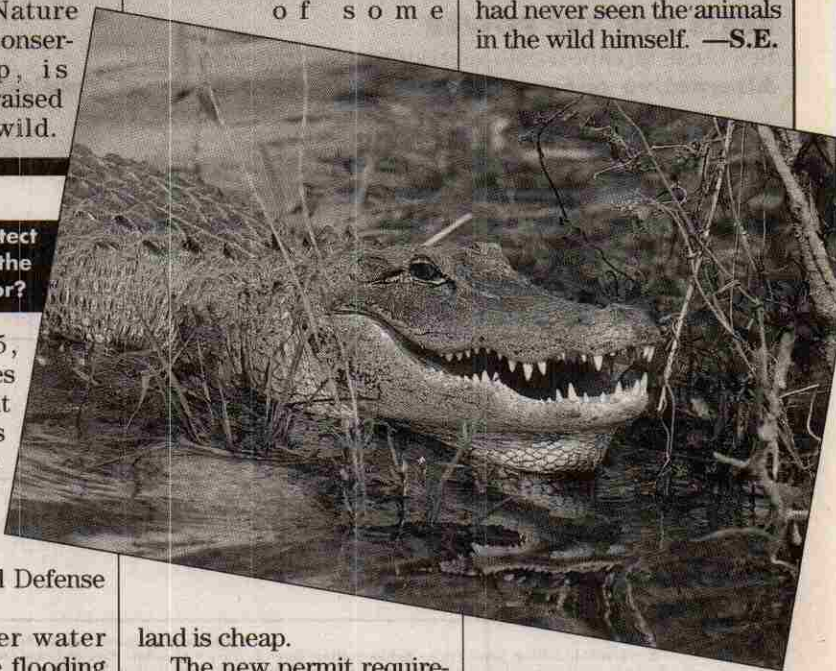
land is cheap.

The new permit requirement may slow wetlands destruction, environmentalists say, because loggers will be forced to move to more expensive land or use less harmful, more costly tree-farming methods.

But some loggers disagree. "Our operations do

not destroy wetlands and therefore will not require a permit," says Scott Berg of the American Forest and Paper Products Association. His group plans to fight the permit requirement in court.

—John Henry Dreyfuss



Larry Lipsky/Tom Stack & Assoc.